

Message Text

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SUBJECT: LEA'S TRAVELS: IS THIS TRIP REALLY NECESSARY?

1. DESPITE THE FAWNING AND HOOPLA WITH WHICH PRES. ECHEVERRIA'S TRICONTINENTAL TRIP WAS LAUNCHED, BY NO MEANS EVERYONE IN MEXICO IS CONVINCED THAT HIS 42-DAY ABSENCE FROM THE COUNTRY IS A GOOD THING. PRIVATELY, MORE THAN A FEW MEXICANS HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN AT THE SIZE OF HIS ENTOURAGE (SOME 200-ODD WITH HANGERS-ON), ITS COSTS, ITS DUBIOUS PURPOSES, AND ITS INTERRUPTION OF ONGOING GOVERNMENTAL WORK AT HOME.

2. A FEW BRAVE SOULS HAVE CUTIOUSLY EXPRESSED THEIR MSGIVINGS IN PRINT IN RECENT DAYS, USUALLY IN OBLIQUE FASHION BY UNDER-SCORING PRESSING PROBLEMS WHICH THE PRESIDENT WILL BE LEAVING BEHIND. A NOTABLE EXAMPLE WAS A COLUMN IN INFLUENTIAL "EXCELSIRO" JULY 8 BY SAMUEL DEL VILLAR. WITH DEFT SARCASM, DEL VILLAR:

-- PRESUMES ECHEVERRIA TRIP MUST BE EXTRAORDINARILY IMPORTANT TO MEXICO'S INTERESTS, SINCE OTHERWISE PRESIDENT'S LENGTHY ABSENCE DURING PERIOD OF ECONOMIC DIFFICULTY AND POLITICAL SENSITIVITY WOULD NOT BE JUSTIFIED.

-- DESCRIBES AS "ABSURD" THE NOTION THAT MEXICO FACES ANY SORT OF CRISIS SO SERIOUS THAT IT COULD WEAKEN THE SYSTEM'S STABILITY UNLESS PRESIDENT WERE ON HAND TO DEAL WITH IT.

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-- NOTES NEVERTHELESS THAT TRADE DEFICIT HAS BECOME SO SERIOUS

THAT EMERGENCY MEASURES MAY SOON BE REQUIRED, AND THAT POLITICALLY THIS PORTION OF EACH PRESIDENT'S TERM (WHEN HIS SUCCESSOR IS CHOSEN) IS FAR AND AWAY THE MOST DELICATE.

-- DISMISSES AS "FRIVOLOUS" THE EXPLANATION THAT THE TRIP'S PURPOSE LIES IN ADVANCING ECHEVERRIA'S CANDIDACY FOR UN SECRETARY GENERALSHIP, OBSERVING THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD HIMSELF ALREADY DISMISSED HIS CHANCES FOR THAT POST.

-- SIMILARLY DOWNPLAYS TRIP'S VALUE IN TERMS OF IMPROVING MEXICO'S IMAGE ABROAD, SINCE PREVIOUS TRIPS HAVE OBVIOUSLY LEFT LITTLE MORE THAN MOST GENERAL IMPRESSION OF THIS COUNTRY'S POLICIES AND PURPOSES.

-- CONCLUDES THAT PRIME JUSTIFICATION MUST LIE IN PROSPECTS FOR CLOSER TIES WITH OPEC COUNTRIES, TIES WHICH REQUIRE THE PERSONAL ATTENTION OF THE PRESIDENT (AND THE MOST EXPENSIVE TRIP TO DATE) TO SOLIDIFY, AND WHICH MIGHT BE EXPECTED TO HELP MEXICO OUT OF ITS CURRENT ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES.

3. COMMENT: WE CANNOT HELP BUT AGREE WITH DEL VILLAR'S IMPLICATIONS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S SIX-WEEK ABSENCE FROM HIS POST DURING A PERIOD OF GROWING ECONOMIC STRAINS AND INTENSE POLITICAL MANEUVERING SUCH AS THE PRESENT ONE REFLECTS AN ATTITUDE OF SUPREME SELF-CONFIDENCE -- IF NOT OUTRIGHT ARROGANCE.

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